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## FOR THE LOVE OF BOOKS PHILIP BLACKWELL

Philip Blackwell has spent his life surrounded by books. When his family's legendary publishing powerhouse was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in 2006, he took time off to travel the world, but his first love wasn't far from his mind. While staying at luxe resorts the world over, he discovered, and was dismayed by, their lackluster libraries. For a lifelong bibliophile, it was enough to take matters into his own hands.

The result was Ultimate Library, founded in 2008. As the arbiter of all things literary, Blackwell conceives highly specific and thoughtful bookshelves that encourage guests to immerse themselves in a good book. It's his small way of creating what he refers to as intelligent luxury—a mode of self-care for the mind. "Our book collections are designed to support people who are asset rich but time poor," he says. "Rediscovering the pleasure of reading is a vital part [of what we do]."

Blackwell is a raconteur in his own way, using books to set the scene. "There's that old saying that books make a house a home," he says. "If a hotel should be a home away from home, but better, then it follows that the book collection needs to be intelligently selected." He chooses books by mining inspiration from the owners and the guest, while also taking cues from the hotel's interiors and the defining characteristics of the neighborhood. If guests want to understand Bangkok, for instance, he might add John Burdett's series of Bangkok-based detective novels. "They will



take you to places you wouldn't necessarily want to go," he says, "But they'll give insight into the city."

His first project was with Six Senses, and since then, he's curated bookshelves for the likes of Marriott, Aman, Four Seasons, and Firdale Hotels. At the Ham Yard Hotel in London, the cozy library has proven to be the perfect respite for weary travelers. "They disappear into the library and come out three hours later with a mile-wide grin because they have found interesting things to read." Invariably, he says, the bookshelves require their own facelifts. In addition to the natural wear and tear, there's a constant stream of new and interesting books published every year. Not to mention, guests can fall so deeply in love with a story and surreptitiously check out of the hotel with the book in tow. "We have the occasional property write on their book plates, 'Don't take me, take the toiletries,'" he says.

He's currently expanding Ultimate Library's original premise by launching a literary salon in conjunction with Firdale that welcomes authors to speak about their works. In that same vein, the company also includes a philanthropic arm that teams up with hotels to donate children's books to schools, community centers, or local libraries of their choice.

"I'm passionate about books," he says, "and I'm passionate about the right books in the right place at the right time for people to engage with. I'm endlessly amused, but then flattered, to create book collections for hotels and resorts."



Dust jackets were removed at the Ham Yard Hotel in London to colorfully match the interiors

A reading nook at the Ham Yard Hotel

